One student's journey to stop hazing

By Cassandra Carlson, Mustang Daily

One Cal Poly student has been recognized nationally for his proactive stance and efforts to halt hazing at his fraternity.

Aerospace engineering senior and Tau Kappa Epsilon member Adrian Herrera was recently named one of the nation's Anti-Hazing Heroes by hazingprevention.org.

After attending a workshop at the Western Regional Greek Leadership Conference (WRGLC) last spring, Herrera decided to report his own fraternity; though hazing was considered common practice by most - even he had been hazed - he wanted to put a stop to it.

For over a year, Herrera was concerned with his fraternity's activities involving new pledges. After Herrera attended an Undergraduate Interfraternity Institute Conference, he realized that there was an anti-hazing movement within the organization. This conference stirred a turn of events that the Tau Kappa Epsilon Rho Omicron chapter at Cal Poly was not ready for.

"I definitely pulled the carpet from underneath them," he said.

After some initial opposition within his fraternity - based mainly on the idea that hazing practices kept with tradition - and his corresponding warning that he would report them if the hazing continued, Herrera eventually pulled members onto his side.

One member Herrera credits with contributing to the end of hazing is Jacob Lopez, a social science junior, new member educator and chaplain to the group. Lopez presented factual information to the group about hazing, adding even more information to the much discussed and debated topic.

"I think it might be more difficult to remove it from fraternities than sororities because there is very much a childish machismo attitude surrounding hazing," Lopez said. "I very much believe in the greek community and believe that it can rid itself of hazing."

The fraternity as a whole was still divided on the issue even after many of its members went to a leadership conference. That's when Herrera decided to report his chapter.

"The people at the international headquarters say to report to your brother, and if you can't tell any other chapter what you are doing, it is illegal," he said.

As a result, TKE was suspended from all new member activities and social events and put on a moratorium.
At first Herrera did not vouch that he was the one who reported his own fraternity.

"I didn't feel validated in telling them, and in retrospect nobody came up to me and asked me," Herrera said. "The international headquarters was very supportive of my decision and pro-active about the situation by interviewing every person."

Already ostracized, he received hate mail from his brothers and was cut off from relationships with long-time friends.

Stephan Lamb, Cal Poly adviser to the Interfraternity Council, is proud of Herrera and his actions.

"Adrian is a man of conviction," he said of the current IFC president. "He emulates values of the whole greek organization by standing up to the fraternity and taking an unpopular position. That speaks to strength and to the ideals of the organization."

At Cal Poly, there are more than 2,000 students in the greek system, which is comprised of 20 fraternities, seven (soon to be nine) traditional sororities, and 11 culture-based greek organizations.

"We educate each class by presenting a special meeting prior to recruitment to describe what hazing is, past situations, and talk about consequences," Lamb said.

Adrienne Miller, Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities coordinator, emphasized that students should go to a teacher, club advisor, Greek Affairs or her office to report hazing. Her office would then conduct an investigation.

"Students have individual responsibility standards of conduct," Miller said. "Our investigations consist of asking questions on behalf of Student Life and Leadership and present findings of individual responsibility. Students can be put on disciplinary probation, meaning they cannot violate standards of student conduct."

In the end, the Cal Poly chapter of TKE was not disbanded, as the hazing was self-reported. According to Herrera, all its members had a probation mark on their records.

These alleged marks and the volunteer hours the members were told to complete led many fraternity members to quit, Herrera said.

"When people left, it was a sting to the fraternity because we couldn't deal with the vision of the frat," Herrera said. "We started past fall with 14 and lost 11. People were even put on alumni status because they were from Cuesta."

With the no-hazing taking effect, they recruited 18 new members this past fall. One of those new members is Grant Bailey, an anti-hazing pledge class president of TKE and civil engineering freshman.
"I think there are many positive changes that have come and will come out of our fraternity having ceased all hazing practices," Lopez said. "I have much more pride in our organization and it is allowing us to live up to the ideals of our founding fathers. Some of the things we did and other fraternities and sororities do are an embarrassment to the greek community and are where a lot of our negative image comes from. There is no excuse."

Daniel Kim, a soil science senior and Cal Poly Delta Chi associate member counselor, feels that hazing exists both inside and outside the greek community at Cal Poly.

"People automatically assume that only fraternities and sororities haze when the truth is that sports clubs, NCAA Sports and other clubs on this campus do haze; it is just not as publicly known. I personally know of teams and organizations on this campus that do haze that are not greek," Kim said.

"It is not easy to speak out against a topic that is kept under the rug, and Adrian's effort toward changing the hazing culture should be acknowledged," Kim urged.

After all his experiences, Herrera has gained new perspectives and experiences concerning hazing.

"People who are greek need to hold each other accountable. It is their place in the greek community to act like a family. The greek community will be on the forefront to help out other non-greek organizations," Herrera advised.

Herrera now plays the role of IFC president in addition to being involved in the Cal Poly Democrats, the Associated Students, Inc. Lobby Corp., the philanthropic council, University Diversity Enrichment Council, Week of Welcome and the Multi-Cultural Center.

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